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## WHY MEN STRIKE

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After the terrible disorganization throughout the civilized world that the war has caused one would suppose that industry would be disrupted, that prices would be out of proportion to production, that innocent people would suffer, and that scoundrels would bleed their fellows; but the war cannot be wholly to blame for the attitude of the workingman during this period of reorganization. One would think that everybody would so rejoice that the conflict was over that they would settle down into their niche and work to bring back the old order of things. Instead we hear of nothing but strikes and labor disputes in all sorts of industries. The war no doubt precipitated this state of affairs, but the cause is something more fundamental and deep-seated in the very nature of modern industry. This reason is the fact that *the work of modern tradesmen, craftsmen, and laborers is so specialized, so devoid of intrinsic interest that the workman finds no incentive to work except the pay he receives.* The nature of the daily work of most of the working people absolutely precludes the possibility of their loving the work. Most of them hate it, and how can they help hating a job which means, for instance, that they go through a set of motions (which they learned in a very short time) hundreds of times a day with the prospect of day after day, week after week, year in and year out doing the same thing?

A common notion is that men hate work, that instinctively they are lazy. Such a notion is itself a product of specialization of labor and has no foundation in fact. When such an opinion is expressed what is meant is that the individual does not readily apply himself to the conventional task. From earliest childhood the tendency to activity is repressed. As long as the child is too weak to get off its back, its kicking, waving of arms, cooing, and incessant activity are admired and no one wishes to stop it. When it gets old

enough to meddle with things its activity annoys elders and the repression begins. He is penned in a coop so that he cannot dirty the walls or pull off the table covers; he is put into a high chair for the convenience of his elders and strapped so that he will not fall. As he gets older he is taught not to climb trees, not to play as he would like to, not to fight if he is insulted because he must keep clean and be a gentleman. When he gets inquisitive and asks a thousand or more questions he is told to keep quiet. His play must be of a quiet, gentlemanly, grown-up variety. The poor chap has a hard life keeping from doing the things that he would like to do.

The school training is a continuation in the same process. He has to keep very quiet, ask nothing but consistent questions, and absorb information from teacher or books. He must not waste his time studying the things he desires to investigate for they are not important. His elders know what it is important that he learn and he must adhere to their program. When he goes into the world and gets work he is there also taught exactly what he must do and he is disciplined into doing it. *A good workman is one who gets to work on time, does with some signs of vigor what he is told to do, and keeps his mouth shut. He is nothing but a machine,* a machine easier to handle than his steam-driven comrades because he can be given oral directions and can take care of himself. He has the additional faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, which to some employers are valuable. He is capable of more varied reactions than any other machine yet invented; but he has the inconvenient faculty of getting sick or failing to appear on time and is likely to make mistakes.

No human being could possibly be normal and be lazy in the sense of being inactive. The lazy man does things but does not fit into society; he does not do just as others want him to do. A man is less active at certain periods of his life than at others and throughout life more or less time has to be taken for sleep. There are differences in degree of activity above the threshold of laziness. When we think of a lazy man we get the picture of a man lying in bed to an unseemly hour, shirking his work, and really less active than others. This is due to the fact that the struggle between what he would like to do and what he ought to do keeps him from acting

at all. He hates to do the conventional thing and he is drilled against the unconventional so that he dares not do it; hence he does neither. *Laziness is an abnormality resulting from the conflict between desires to act in unconventional ways and fear of the results coupled with a distaste for conventional activity.*

What forces are brought to bear to make a workman constantly do the work he dislikes? At first the child is made to do the thing he dislikes through physical force; later such forces as shame, fear of being different from others, and ambition are brought to bear until finally as the boy becomes a man the economic motive becomes paramount. He learns that if he is to get from life what others do he must get money, and to get money he must fit into the scheme and work as others do. When a man sees that he must work as a machine and actually does it the distastefulness largely disappears. No man can constantly do a really distasteful thing and the distaste remain the same. He becomes adapted to it. If you taste something sour you get at first the full effect of the sourness; if you keep tasting the same sour thing the keenness of the sensation departs and you fail to notice that it is sour. The fact that the man does the routine job for so long makes him adapt himself to its unpleasantness and he forgets that he dislikes it. The fact remains, however, that it is distasteful and there is nothing in the work itself that induces the man to do it.

This is the asset that labor agitators can always depend upon. The agitator knows that few men love their work, so that when times get a little abnormal and the wages that the men get will not buy as much as they would like, it is an easy matter to get them in a frame of mind where they will be willing to quit. Why do not agitators work with teachers and preachers who are more poorly paid than the ordinary workman? For the simple reason that a large proportion of the people in these classes are in their work because they like it and work for the work's sake; they would sacrifice a great deal before they would quit.

Men are induced to do things through all sorts of external motives, but master-motives must be intrinsic in the work itself if the work is to go on to its best advantage. If the motive for work lies outside the work the least resistance or obstacle will check it, but if the motive is in the work itself the obstacle will

only stimulate the individual to increased efforts to overcome the obstacle, and the work will go on as before.

How can men be made to love their work? With conditions as complex as they are the situation cannot be wholly relieved. Men cannot be left free to do as they choose in a society such as ours. Yet when the truth is understood many improvements can be made. When employers know that attractiveness of work is more important than pay they will take pains to make the work attractive. *Money is not as strong an incentive as it is usually supposed to be.* When that is all a man gets from his work of course he will take any means possible to get all he can. When he works from other motives he will become less vividly conscious of the amount of pay he receives.

The only remedy that will lastingly overcome this social unrest is to make work interesting for all classes from the laborer to the professional man. We must forever get rid of the notion that anything interesting is for that reason either useless or conducive to inefficiency. The old theory of education used to be that the duller, uninteresting subjects were better for the student than the interesting ones because of the disciplinary value of making the student do what he disliked. The modern method, which has proven a better one, is to present the dead subjects in an interesting way. Psychology has shown that the way to do a thing quickly and well is to become intensely interested in it. Why not make work interesting? It can be done and the employer will eventually save by doing it.

If work is to be made interesting the recent stress upon efficiency with its consequent overspecialization will have to be curtailed. To be constantly stressing the quantity and quality of work done is to furnish a superficial external drive. The extra pay that the man gets will at first look large but it will appear less and less, especially when the scheme becomes more widely used and all men get more pay. The incentive will fail and the workmen rebel.

Enough variation must be left in each man's job to kill the monotony.

Each man should be taught about his job in relation to the others so that he will feel that he is a vital part of the organization.

Each man should clearly see a possible route for promotion. If a man is hired as a stoker with a beginning salary of so much, with the promises of periodical raises until a certain point is reached, all incentive for good work is killed in that man. He must be able to see where he could go beyond the stage of being a stoker. It does not matter if the man has but one chance in a thousand of making a certain step, let him know he has that chance and he will inevitably try to be the one.

When we were training our great national army each man was continually told that his job was important in the winning of the war; he was taught to love his job, the distasteful job of drilling. Besides he was filled with an ambition to do his best because he was shown the proper steps to gain promotion and saw others being promoted through tests of merit. After the signing of the armistice no one felt that he was vitally necessary and to cap this the War Department stopped all promotions. The spirit of the soldiers dropped like lead and it was almost impossible to get anything done. "What is the use since the war is over and I have no chance of any promotion?" was the cry.

All promotions should be based on merit alone and in such a way that every employee is convinced that it is merit alone that counts. Tell him what qualities are used in judging whether a man is to be promoted or not. Frankness on this one subject will work wonders.

Not only should the man be given a square deal but pains should be taken that he knows that he is being fairly treated, not by blatant advertising but by open straightforward organization. An employer may shower gifts upon his men in the way of recreation rooms, extra holidays, bonuses, etc., but if he is not manifestly fair the men will spurn his gifts and believe that he is trying to appease them for having robbed them.

When the workman was an artisan he was interested in the efficiency of the process in which he was engaged and took pride in the handling of his tools. Today the machine is the artisan and the workman the tool, and no intelligent man can take an interest in being an efficient tool. *The present industrial unrest will not cease until the workman is studied as a human organism with the purpose in mind of giving him some interest in his work besides the pay he receives.*